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After the Storm: Challenges in Infant Care, Healthcare Access, and
Housing after Hurricane Helene

This poster shares observational data on family and community wellness gathered five weeks after Hurricane Helene's impact in Western North Carolina. Researchers observed multiple pressing issues for survivors of Helene, particularly housing, access to health services, and the experiences of families with infants and young children. During the November 2024 reconnaissance work, the research team visited various donation sites across the affected area, focusing on assessing the stockpiles of infant formula and other items related to childcare and feeding. We observed plentiful collections of infant formula, but limited supplies and information to assist with breast/chest feeding. Researchers also found expired infant formula at multiple sites. This shows the dangers of relying solely on formula or switching to formula rather than breast/chest feeding during disasters due to a lack of means to sanitize necessary materials, such as bottles.

In addition to disparities in infant feeding, observations also included healthcare access and housing. For example, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Office in Boone, NC, was closed, and information about where families could go for support was unclear. People also mentioned the trauma of driving past debris daily. Further, affordable housing remains scarce as many homes were damaged or destroyed due to flooding and landslides. These challenges suggest a strenuous road ahead for family and community recovery in Western North Carolina.

Presentation Theme: Disaster Vulnerability.

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